

Chairman's Report

2014/15

The past year has seen the Parish Council continue to work with other village organisations for the benefit of residents. I should like to express particular thanks to our Vicar Adrian Judd and Church Warden Carole Morrell for their cooperation in this endeavour.

With the Tythe Barn and stone planter projects completed, we turned our attention to tidying up some areas which had been allowed to deteriorate. We recently formed a working group to trim the trees on Philips lane and we have rebuilt a couple of walls which had fallen down. Though the walls were really the responsibility of WMDC, they told us that they would have to wait until funds became available. Rather than leave the mess we decided to do the work ourselves; WMDC agreed to pay for the materials, and Parish Councillors provided the labour. To my mind this is what localism is really all about. Our council strives to be more than just a talking shop, we believe that if something needs doing and it is in our power to do it, we should roll up our sleeves and get it done.

Regular annual events were not neglected, the Scarecrow Competition continues to be popular with more people joining in each year and the Christmas Carol service was a great success. Moving the venue seems to have been a popular decision and I should like to thank the staff at the school for their input, especially for the post event refreshments. The donation of the main village Christmas tree by the Brotherhood Church was very much appreciated and the re-sighting was a great improvement. Unfortunately in moving the tree to a safer position we were unable to use the mains electrical supply for lighting and the battery lights that we tried instead were not a great success. We will have to reconsider our options for this year. Decorating the Reading Rooms for Christmas also proved to be popular and one Christmas event alone produced a profit of over £400.

Recently one item caught the parish council by surprise. In the seven years that I have served we have constantly struggled to attract people to join us. We were quite aware that the council was not representative, being made up entirely of gentlemen of a similar age. Our efforts to attract a broader cross section of councillors have in the past come to nothing, so we were somewhat surprised to find that three ladies stood for election this year. While it was encouraging to find that so many people wanted to work for the community, unfortunately this necessitated an election, which is expensive. We have been informed by WMDC that we will be receiving a bill for around £2500 for this service. As our only income is our £11,000 precept, it is evident that the election expenses will take around 22% of that. Fortunately, our financial situation remains stable, thanks to the foresight of our RFO Cllr' Stainer, we retain a contingency fund of around £7000 which will easily cover the election expenses, but we would have much rather spent the money on something for the village; however, the matter is out of our hands.

One disappointing aspect of the last few months has been a number of acts of vandalism. The new bushes which we planted on Philips Lane were uprooted, the swag ropes in the Tythe Barn have been broken three times in the last few weeks; when we recently planted a substantial shrub by the side of the Dove Cote; (which had been donated by a resident); that too was ripped out shortly afterwards. The same group of children have been observed committing these acts and they were caught on CCTV tipping up a garden waste bin, but the image was not good enough to use against

them. There have been other acts of vandalism which may also be attributable to the same group, however unlike the items mentioned no one witnessed them. Clearly we are aware who the children are and the information has been passed on to our PCSO. It is sad that such a small group can cause such mayhem, but without evidence not much can be done to stop them.

Finally I can-not allow the loss of two councillors to pass without comment. Ian Thompson had only been a councillor for a short period, but prior to joining us he attended almost all our meetings. He also acted as internal auditor for a number of years for which he made no charge. He was in short someone who showed interest in the activities of the council and as soon as he discovered that he could be of use to the community he volunteered his services; to my mind an ideal councillor. Though we did not always agree, I found his arguments to be well judged and well presented. I shall miss his level headed thinking in our future meetings.

The other councillor who lost his place at the recent election was Jonathan Jackson. Jonathan is a quiet man who though eloquent tends to put deeds before talk. On the day of the election Jonathan was with me rebuilding the churchyard wall. I find it somewhat ironic the number of people who must have walked past him quietly getting on with his job, as they went off to vote for someone else. I frequently receive the credit for work in our village which in truth has been the efforts equally of other councillors, particularly Jonathan Jackson my almost constant companion. I will miss his efforts especially.

The council have plenty of ongoing work and have ideas for future projects. The old orchard between Phillips Lane and Church lane is something that we are looking at. We have had a number of suggestions for developing this land into a quiet seating area, a car park, allotments or even a bowling green. We would of course require the permission of the church authorities, but with the Vicar and Churchwarden working with us anything is possible.

No doubt our new councillors will step in to fill the void left by the outgoing gentlemen, Fiona Smith has already started, she helped rebuild part of the stone wall on Church lane before she joined the council and I am sure that Councillors Johnson and Stones can't wait to roll their sleeves up and get stuck in.

During my tenure as chairman Darrington Parish Council has always been proactive, with all councillors working together for the good of the community and I very much hope that this will continue in the coming year.

Michael Britton MA
Chairman Darrington Parish Council.